DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 316 IR 005 356

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TITLE Network Prime-Time Violence Tabulations for 1975-76 Season.
INSTITUTION Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., New York, N.Y. Office of Social Research.
PUB DATE Apr 76
NOTE 18p.; For related document, see IR 005 357

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Annual Reports; Programing (Broadcast); Tables (Data); *Television Research; Television Surveys; *Violence

ABSTRACT

This is an annual report on violence in prime-time television. The tabulations, based on 13 weeks of monitoring prime-time programs on three networks, indicate a decline in violence by 24% and a decline in the rate per hour of dramatic violence to 1.9 incidents per hour since last season. The study also indicated that the introduction of the family viewing period accompanied this marked decrease. CBS has the lowest rate of violence of the three networks. This is attributed to a decline in the average number of violent incidents in action programs and a reduction in the number of hours scheduled for showing feature films. Data from the current survey and from previous years are presented, and definitions of terms used in the study are provided in the appendices. (DAG)

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ED148316

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NETWORK PRIME-TIME VIOLENCE TABULATIONS FOR 1975-76 SEASON

Joseph T. Klapper

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IR003357

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Economics and Research
April 1976

NETWORK PRIME-TIME VIOLENCE TABULATIONS FOR 1975-76 SEASON

Summary

The number of violent incidents in prime time on all three networks combined has substantially declined, compared with the 1974-75 season, and are at their lowest level since our monitoring activities began in the 1972-73 season. On each of the three networks, the amount of prime-time violence is down from last year; CBS and NBC are both at their lowest levels since the inception of monitoring.

Finally, there is relatively little violence before 9:00 PM (only 11 percent of the total for prime time), and the amount of violence after 9:00 PM is down from last year, although somewhat above the level of prior years.

Details of the Study

The violence tabulations for the 1975-76 season, covering 13 weeks for each network, indicate a decline in violence during prime-time programming.* For the three networks combined, the occurrence of incidents of dramatic violence has declined by 24 percent. The rate per hour of dramatic violence has dropped to a corresponding extent and is now at the level of about 1.9 incidents per hour of prime-time television.

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* All prime-time entertainment programming, excluding news, sports, and documentaries, was monitored for incidents of dramatic violence. Comic violence was not included in the tabulations. (See Technical Appendix for definitions of violence.) Dates of specific weeks analyzed are available on request.

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On CBS, the occurrence of incidents of dramatic violence has markedly declined from last season, decreasing by 36 percent. CBS has the lowest rate of violence of the three networks and is at its lowest level of violence since these tabulations began in September, 1972 (Table 1).

Most of the decline in violence on CBS can be attributed to a decline in the average number of violent incidents on CBS "action" programs. For the 13 weeks included in this report, the average number of violent incidents per hour of "action" programming was 3.7; last season it was closer to 5. There has also been a reduction in the number of hours devoted to feature films, which results in a lesser contribution of film violence to the overall total (Table 2).

Both NBC and ABC show a decline in prime-time violence from last season. The amount of violence on NBC is at its lowest level since these tabulations began in 1972. ABC shows a decline from last year, but not from prior years (Table 1).

The Question of Week-to-Week Variation

The data in this memorandum covers 13 weeks of programming for each network and provides enough information to assess the extent of week-to-week variation.

In previous tabulations, which included only two weeks of programming, an effort was made to select weeks that represented as little variation from regularly scheduled programming as possible. The decision was made this season to expand the sample to a longer time interval that would more closely approximate the true average incidence of

dramatic violence in prime-time programming. Preemptions for specials and sports events occur throughout the season, and weeks in which preemptions occur are as characteristic of prime-time programming as weeks which adhere to the regular schedule. Both types of weeks are included in the sample, and this is one of the major sources of week-to-week variation.

Another source of week-to-week variation is differences in the nature of the films shown. Each of the networks had some weeks in which films with little or no violence were shown; conversely, each of the networks had at least one week dominated by extremely violent film content.

"Action" programs are more stable in rate of violence (averaging between 3-5 violent incidents per hour) but even here there is some week-to-week variation. There is also the additional factor of preemptions which result in fewer than the number of "action" programs scheduled being shown in some weeks.

Because of all these factors, the week-to-week variation in the extent of dramatic violence becomes quite large, as shown in Table 3. For each of the networks, one or more individual weeks varied considerably from the overall 13-week average. If only one week had been selected to represent this season, the outcomes might have been considerably higher or lower than those obtained. Thus, confirming our earlier hypothesis, we find that expansion of the number of weeks monitored results in a much more realistic appraisal of the amounts of violence on prime-time network programs.*

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* Standard deviations of the mean number of incidents (a statistical measure of dispersion or variation from the average) were 7.38, 10.67, and 10.80 for CBS, NBC, and ABC, respectively. Means are shown in Table 1.

Pre- and Post-9:00 PM Violence (All Networks Combined)

In the current season, dramatic violence is confined mainly to the post-9:00 PM ET period. Only 11 percent of the total incidents of dramatic violence recorded occurred in what has been defined as the network family viewing period, which constitutes 36 percent of prime-time hours. In the sample weeks in previous years, programs involving dramatic violence seem to have been about evenly distributed over the prime-time period, so that about one-third, more or less, of the dramatic violence occurred before 9:00 PM. In the 1974-75 season, however, there was already some evidence of declining violence in the early evening hours; in the March, 1975 sample week in particular, only 17 percent of prime-time violence occurred before 9:00 PM (Table 4).

In absolute terms, there has been a marked decline in the number of violent incidents that occur in the pre-9:00 PM period (Table 5). It should also be noted that the introduction of the family viewing period in the current season has been accompanied by a perceptible decrease in post-9:00 PM violence as compared with the 1974-75 season. Violence in the post-9:00 PM prime-time period is somewhat above the levels occurring in 1972-73 and 1973-74.

Changes in Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs

In general, a major share of the dramatic violence that occurs in prime-time entertainment television programming occurs in regularly scheduled "action" programs. This season 71 percent of the violent incidents recorded occurred in this type of program.

The number of hours of "action" programming scheduled this season is slightly higher than the 1974-75 season: 25.5 hours as compared to 24.

For each network, the average number of hours of "action" programming tabulated is less than the number of scheduled hours. This is to be expected in a sample carried over many weeks, since the replacement of regularly scheduled "action" programming by specials of a nonviolent nature is bound to occur occasionally. NBC "action" programs in particular appeared less frequently than scheduled in the sample weeks because of preemptions for the World Series and other special programming.

With regard to the average number of violent incidents of "action" programs, CBS shows a substantial decline from last year. There was an average of close to five incidents in each hour of "action" programming in the 1974-75 season on CBS, compared to a rate of 3.7 this season (Table 6).

NBC "action" programs are at about the same level of violence as those of CBS, decreasing slightly from last season's rate. ABC's "action" programs contain, on average, a somewhat higher rate of violence than they did last year (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 1

Changes in Prime-Time Dramatic Violence

	Average number of incidents of dramatic violence	Average number of hours	Average rate of violent incidents per hour	% Increase or decrease in incidents	% Increase or decrease in rate per hour
CBS					
1972-73 (2-week average)	48	20.5	2.3		
1973-74 (" ")	40.5	21	1.9	- 16%	- 17%
1974-75 (" ")	51	21	2.4	+ 26	+ 26
1975-76 (13-week average)	32.5	21.3	1.5	- 36	- 38
NBC					
1972-73 (2-week average)	49.5	20	2.5		
1973-74 (" ")	54.5	20.9	2.6	+ 10%	+ 4%
1974-75 (" ")	47.5	21.2	2.2	- 13	- 15
1975-76 (13-week average)	37.9	20.5	1.8	- 20	- 18
ABC					
1972-73 (2-week average)	40.5	19.5	2.1		
1973-74 (" ")	46	20	2.3	+ 14%	+ 10%
1974-75 (" ")	58.5	20.1	2.9	+ 27	+ 26
1975-76 (13-week average)	49.5	20.2	2.4	- 15	- 17

Table 2

Extent of Dramatic Violence on Prime-Time Entertainment Television - Thirteen Week Sample

	Average number of incidents of dramatic violence	Average number of hours	Average rate per hour
CBS			
"Action" programs*	24.8	6.6	3.73
Other programs**	1.3	12.4	.10
Made-for-TV and feature films	6.4	2.2	2.88
Total***	32.5	21.3	1.53
NBC			
"Action" programs*	25.0	7.5	3.32
Other programs**	2.8	8.4	.33
Made-for-TV and feature films	10.2	4.5	2.24
Total***	37.9	20.5	1.85
ABC			
"Action" programs*	35.9	8.2	4.36
Other programs**	2.5	6.9	.37
Made-for-TV and feature films	11.0	5.1	2.16
Total***	49.5	20.2	2.45

* Regularly scheduled crime, mystery, western programs.
** General drama, comedy, variety--both regularly scheduled and special.
*** Minor differences between final totals and sum of figures due to rounding.

Table 3

Range of Week-to-Week Variation in Dramatic Violence

	Range in number of incidents of dramatic violence	Range in number of hours	Range in average rate per hour
CBS			
"Action" programs*	15-32	5-7	3.0-4.6
Other programs**	0-3	11-14	0-.2
Made-for-TV and feature films	0-21	0-4	0-6
Total***	19-44	20-22.3	.9-2
NBC			
"Action" programs*	12-36	4-9.5	2.7-4.1
Other programs**	0-9	4-12	0-.8
Made-for-TV and feature films	0-29	4-7	0-4.8
Total***	19-56	13-22.5	1.2-2.5
ABC			
"Action" programs*	19-47	7-9	2.7-5.2
Other programs**	0-10	4.5-9	0-1.4
Made-for-TV and feature films	2-26	3.5-7.8	.4-3.5
Total***	32-65	16-22.2	1.8-3.1

* Regularly scheduled crime, mystery, western programs.
** General drama, comedy, variety--both regularly scheduled and special.
*** Minimum and maximum range for weekly totals, including all three program categories.

Table 4

Proportion of All Dramatic Violence
in Prime Time Before 9:00 PM, ET

(All Three Networks Combined)

	% of Dramatic Violence Before 9:00 PM, ET
Sept. 1972 (one week)	34
Feb. 1973 (" ")	29
Oct. 1973 (" ")	35
Feb. 1974 (" ")	31
Nov. 1974 (" ")	27
March 1975 (" ")	17
1975-76 (13-week average)	11

Table 5

Incidents of Dramatic Violence
Before and After 9:00 PM EST

(All Three Networks Combined)

	Weekly Number of Incidents Before 9:00 PM, ET	Weekly Number of Incidents After 9:00 PM, ET
1972-73 (2-week average)	44	94
1973-74 (" ")	46	95
1974-75 (" ")	35	122
1975-76 (13-week average)	14	106

Table 6

Changes in Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
on Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs

CBS

	Number of Hours of Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs	Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
Sept. 1972	5.0	5.6
Feb. 1973	6.0	4.7
'72-'73 Season (2-week average)	5.5 hours	5.1 incidents per hour
Oct. 1973	8.5	4.2
Feb. 1974	6.0	3.2
'73-'74 Season (2-week average)	7.2 hours	3.8 incidents per hour
Nov. 1974	8.0	4.2
Mar. 1975	7.0	5.4
'74-'75 Season (2-week average)	7.5 hours	4.8 incidents per hour
1975-76 (13-week average)	6.6*	3.7

* There were seven hours of "action" programming scheduled on CBS in both the first and second half of the season.

Table 7

Changes in Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
on Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs

NBC

	Number of Hours of Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs	Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
Sept. 1972	9	5.8
Feb. 1973	5.5	4.0
'72-'73 Season (2-week average)	7.2 hours	5.1 incidents per hour
Oct. 1973	7.5	3.9
Feb. 1974	8.0	3.5
'73-'74 Season (2-week average)	7.8 hours	3.7 incidents per hour
Nov. 1974	7.5	4.0
Mar. 1975	7.5	3.2
'74-'75 Season (2-week average)	7.5 hours	3.6 incidents per hour
1975-76 (13-week average)	7.5*	3.3

* There were nine hours of "action" programs scheduled on NBC in the first half of the season and ten in the second half.

Table 8

Changes in Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
on Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs

ABC

	Number of Hours of Regularly Scheduled "Action" Programs	Rate Per Hour of Dramatic Violence
Sept. 1972	7.0	4.1
Feb. 1973	5.0	5.4
'72-'73 Season (2-week average)	6.0 hours	4.7 incidents per hour
Oct. 1973	6.0	4.7
Feb. 1974	7.5	5.7
'73-'74 Season (2-week average)	6.8 hours	5.2 incidents per hour
Nov. 1974	8.0	4.4
Mar. 1975	10.0	3.5
'74-'75 Season (2-week average)	9.0 hours	3.9 incidents per hour
1975-76 (13-week average)	8.2*	4.4

* There were nine hours of "action" programs scheduled on ABC for both the first and the second half of the season.

TECHNICAL APPENDICES

I. Analysis of Violence in Prime-Time Programming

In previous seasons, the Office of Social Research has monitored two sample weeks of prime-time television a year. One of the two sample weeks was monitored in the fall and the other after February 1, in order to take account of any midseason program changes. The sample weeks were chosen to reflect, as closely as possible, the normal prime-time schedule. Weeks containing no or few "specials" were favored over weeks containing several specials.

For the 1975-76 season, thirteen weeks, or half of the 1975-76 season, are included in the sample to reflect more adequately the total range of programming.

Monitoring during the sample weeks covers all regular-series programming and such entertainment specials as are scheduled, as well as theatrical features and made-for-television films. News, documentaries and sports are excluded.

Definition of Violence

Violence was defined for the monitoring as follows:

> "the use of physical force against persons or animals, or the articulated, explicit threat of physical force to compel particular behavior on the part of a person."

The implementation of the definition included accidents or acts of nature which occurred in a violent context as, for example, a person being killed in an automobile accident while escaping from

a crime. Further, all acts intended to cause physical harm (for example, attempted murder) were included, whether they were successful or not.

Violence was counted in terms of incidents. An incident is not absolutely synonymous with an "act." One "incident" might include brief breaks in the action, as in a protracted chase scene, interrupted by pauses for regrouping and reloading or acts of violence by more than one person, as, for example, in a fight scene involving several people.

Unintentional injuries (such as might result from a shove merely intended to get someone out of one's way) were not considered violent, nor were threats that were not backed up by a show of force (along the lines of "I'll get you some day").

A separate count was made of comic violence (e.g., the proverbial slapstick scene of hitting someone with a custard pie). Incidents of comic violence were few and are not included in the total counts of dramatic violence shown here.

Further details regarding the counting procedure will be found in the appended "Definitions and Guidelines as Furnished to Coders."

II. Definitions and Guidelines, as Furnished to Coders

Definition of Violent Episodes

One sustained, dramatically continuous event involving violence, with essentially the same group of participants and with no major interruptions in continuity.

Duration of a Violent Episode

A violent episode begins with either the violent act itself or with a threat of violence (as defined below). For example, if a policeman shouts "Stop, or I'll shoot," and then shoots at the person fleeing, the episode would be counted as beginning with the initial shout.

Categories of Violence

Physical. The use of physical force against persons or animals, whether or not it is successful. For example, if a person shoots at another person and misses, this is still an act of violence. Also included are accidents or acts of nature in a violent context. For example, if a person is killed in an auto accident while escaping from the scene of a crime or the villain of the play is struck by lightning.

Threats of physical force. The articulated, explicit threat of physical force used as compulsion so as to create in the person threatened the fear of bodily harm if he did not comply. However, if threat is accompanied by or immediately followed by physical injury, it will not be counted separately. Do not include those physical actions which are not intended to and apparently do not produce bodily harm (e.g., a shove intended only to get someone out of one's way).

Results of Violence*

There are two categories of results:

(1) Lethal injury (death). Note that if a person is shot and falls down, he cannot be assumed to be dead unless it is clearly indicated. Often it is only later in the program that someone says that the person involved is dead, in the hospital, etc.

(2) Injury. This includes every infliction of pain from a single blow to a gunshot wound.

Comic Violence

An episode of "comic" violence is one in which the violence is in a context which would ordinarily produce laughter.

* These "results of violence" data are not included in this report.